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# **MANSION**



Water damage in the main salon, above, required repairs. Below, dampened paper was used to clean the doorway. The princess picked up a trowel to help with plaster work.



largely lived in a self-contained world, maintaining their neo-feudal power and prestige thanks to the island's distant, nominal rulers, first in Spain, then in Naples.

The Rococo and the Belle Époque eras proved to be exceptions, when Sicily absorbed trends from the wider world. He sees the



palace—with its Catalan origins, Rococo flourishes, and pre-World War I reinvention—as a "paradigm of the history of the Sicilian aristocracy."

The impact of Spain and Naples are on display. In the ballroom, the Rococo frescoes are offset by Spanishstyle religious paintings showing martyred saints

withering with illness. When

18th birthday here, says the

A display cabinet in the

princess, the family used

disco lights to distract

eases."

guests "from all the dis-

grand salon has an early 19th-century Neapolitan por-

celain service, a gift from

the Bourbons, who ruled

Sicily from Naples for the

better part of two centuries.

Sicily's nobles had lost

much of their political and

economic power by the sec-

ond half of the 20th century,

but they gained newfound

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampe-

dusa (1896-1957), a Palermo

prince, whose posthumously

published novel, "The Leop-

ard," about a 19th-century Si-

cilian nobleman, is a classic

of modern European litera-

ture. The 1963 film version,

cultural prestige due to

her daughter had her

centuries-old Palermo club. And they also belong to the Circolo della Vela Sicilia, the exclusive vacht club in Mondello, the Belle Époque resort. But she can still sound like an ordinary Sicilian, taking pride in making a timbale, the island's ornate answer to lasagna, or enjoying ice-cream and brioche for breakfast. And like many of her fellow Sicilians, she has taken up the hospitality trade, opening up her palace to select tours for a few months each year.

starring Burt Lancaster and

These days, the princess and her husband maintain

of old-style Sicilian aristo-

in the Circolo Bellini, the

Claudia Cardinale, was

filmed in and around Pa-

"The cliché of 'The Leopard' that Sicilians are lazy and don't want to change isn't true," she says. "Now everybody is running around trying to save our history-but in a modern way."

During the early stages of the pandemic, she delved into her family archive and found that a number of key purchases for the palace in the 1880s were connected to an ancestor's winning lottery ticket. She even found the winning number. Ever since, she and her husband have been playing the same number—with nothing yet to show for it, she admits. But if she does win, she will invest it right back in the palace. At the top of her shopping list? Contemporary art. "To emphasize that my palazzo is not a mu-





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### **HOW SICILIAN NOBLES LIVE TODAY**

Sicilian palaces, for the most part, have gone from medieval fortresses to lavish Baroque showpieces, offices, museums or ruins. But for a coterie of Sicilian nobles who grew up with remote family memories of splendor, these homes remain a living presence.

"My grandmother was a baroness," says Maria-Antonietta Randazzo, a 42year-old descendant of Sicily's Gagliardo di Carpinello family, who grew up hearing about lost palaces and country thouses. Ms. Randazzo, who manages her family's real-estate portfolio, divides her time between a compound in Pa-Elermo and her own apartment in Milan, where she combines family heirlooms ₹from Sicily's Liberty period, the local variation on Art Nouveau, with the masters of Italy's Midcentury Modernism, like Gio Ponti. "I like to mix my own past with more recent passions," she says.

Aloisa Moncada di Paterno's princely grandparents lived in what may be the



**Palazzo Butera** ▲, celebrated for its stucco ceilings, Chinoiserie doors and extensive waterfront facade. After decades of disrepair, it was sold in 2016 to Genoese art collectors Francesca and Massimo Valsecchi, who are turning it into a contemporary residence and private art museum. Ms. Moncada di Paterno, a 58vear-old vacht broker who grew up hearing about Butera in its heyday, is forging a new kind of connection with the palace, collaborating with the Valsecchis on a new outreach program for training young Palermo artists and artisans. She divides her time between a family villa east of

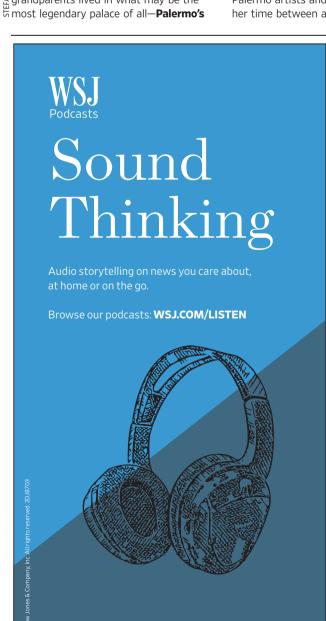
Palermo and an apartment in town, where she uses lighting design from labels such as Milan's Flos. "I am not a typical aristocrat," she says of her scaleddown lifestyle and high-tech tastes. "I am the opposite.'

seum," she says.

Naples-based art curator Pietro Scammacca lives like a typical young professional. "My apartment is very IKEA," says the 27-year-old Sicilian, who has lived just about everywhere but Sicily. When the need to return home arises, he can take advantage of the family palace in the heart of Catania, Sicily's second city. The immense Palazzo Biscari, which dates to the late 17th century, still belongs to his mother's family. He and his Paris-based parents have an apartment they use for visits.

Until recently, he says, he didn't think much about the palace. "My noble background was something I chose to put aside," he says. But lately he has decided to stage contemporary art exhibitions there. Space will not be a problem.

How big is the palazzo? "Some people say there are 500 rooms," he says.

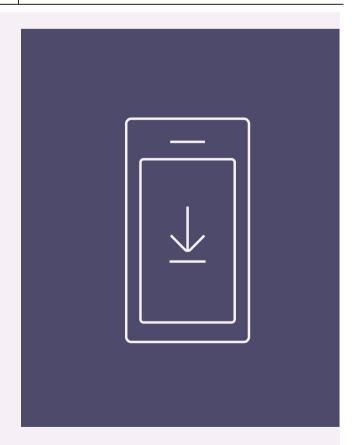


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